

Objection 1. It would seem that Christ was buried in an unbecoming manner. For His burial should be in keeping with His death. But Christ underwent a most shameful death, according to Wis. 2:20: “Let us condemn Him to a most shameful death.” It seems therefore unbecoming for honorable burial to be accorded to Christ, inasmuch as He was buried by men of position—namely, by Joseph of Arimathea, who was “a noble counselor,” to use Mark’s expression (Mk. 15:43), and by Nicodemus, who was “a ruler of the Jews,” as John states (Jn. 3:1).

Objection 2. Further, nothing should be done to Christ which might set an example of wastefulness. But it seems to savor of waste that in order to bury Christ Nicodemus came “bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes about a hundred pounds weight,” as recorded by John (19:39), especially since a woman came beforehand to anoint His body for the burial, as Mark relates (Mk. 14:28). Consequently, this was not done becomingly with regard to Christ.

Objection 3. Further, it is not becoming for anything done to be inconsistent with itself. But Christ’s burial on the one hand was simple, because “Joseph wrapped His body in a clean linen cloth,” as is related by Matthew (27:59), “but not with gold or gems, or silk,” as Jerome observes: yet on the other hand there appears to have been some display, inasmuch as they buried Him with fragrant spices (Jn. 19:40). Consequently, the manner of Christ’s burial does not seem to have been seemly.

Objection 4. Further, “What things soever were written,” especially of Christ, “were written for our learning,” according to Rom. 15:4. But some of the things written in the Gospels touching Christ’s burial in no wise seem to pertain to our instruction—as that He was buried “in a garden. . . in a tomb which was not His own, which was “new,” and “hewed out in a rock.” Therefore the manner of Christ’s burial was not becoming.

On the contrary, It is written (Is. 11:10): “And His sepulchre shall be glorious.”

I answer that, The manner of Christ’s burial is shown to be seemly in three respects. First, to confirm faith in His death and resurrection. Secondly, to commend the devotion of those who gave Him burial. Hence Augustine says (De Civ. Dei i): “The Gospel mentions as praiseworthy the deed of those who received His body from the cross, and with due care and reverence wrapped it up and buried it.” Thirdly, as to the mystery whereby those are molded who “are buried together with Christ into death” (Rom. 6:4).

Reply to Objection 1. With regard to Christ’s death, His patience and constancy in enduring death are com-

mended, and all the more that His death was the more despicable: but in His honorable burial we can see the power of the dying Man, who, even in death, frustrated the intent of His murderers, and was buried with honor: and thereby is foreshadowed the devotion of the faithful who in the time to come were to serve the dead Christ.

Reply to Objection 2. On that expression of the Evangelist (Jn. 19:40) that they buried Him “as the manner of the Jews is to bury,” Augustine says (Tract. in Joan. cxx): “He admonishes us that in offices of this kind which are rendered to the dead, the custom of each nation should be observed.” Now it was the custom of this people to anoint bodies with various spices in order the longer to preserve them from corruption*. Accordingly it is said in De Doctr. Christ. iii that “in all such things, it is not the use thereof, but the luxury of the user that is at fault”; and, farther on: “what in other persons is frequently criminal, in a divine or prophetic person is a sign of something great.” For myrrh and aloes by their bitterness denote penance, by which man keeps Christ within himself without the corruption of sin; while the odor of the ointments expresses good report.

Reply to Objection 3. Myrrh and aloes were used on Christ’s body in order that it might be preserved from corruption, and this seemed to imply a certain need (in the body): hence the example is set us that we may lawfully use precious things medicinally, from the need of preserving our body. But the wrapping up of the body was merely a question of becoming propriety. And we ought to content ourselves with simplicity in such things. Yet, as Jerome observes, by this act was denoted that “he swathes Jesus in clean linen, who receives Him with a pure soul.” Hence, as Bede says on Mark 15:46: “The Church’s custom has prevailed for the sacrifice of the altar to be offered not upon silk, nor upon dyed cloth, but on linen of the earth; as the Lord’s body was buried in a clean winding-sheet.”

Reply to Objection 4. Christ was buried “in a garden” to express that by His death and burial we are delivered from the death which we incur through Adam’s sin committed in the garden of paradise. But for this “was our Lord buried in the grave of a stranger,” as Augustine says in a sermon (ccxlviii), “because He died for the salvation of others; and a sepulchre is the abode of death.” Also the extent of the poverty endured for us can be thereby estimated: since He who while living had no home, after death was laid to rest in another’s tomb, and being naked was clothed by Joseph. But He is laid in a “new” sepulchre, as Jerome observes on Mat. 27:60, “lest after the resurrection it might be pretended that someone

* Cf. Catena Aurea in Joan. xix

else had risen, while the other corpses remained. The new sepulchre can also denote Mary's virginal womb." And furthermore it may be understood that all of us are renewed by Christ's burial; death and corruption being destroyed. Moreover, He was buried in a monument "hewn out of a rock," as Jerome says on Mat. 27:64, "lest, if it had been constructed of many stones, they might say that He was stolen away by digging away the foundations of the tomb." Hence the "great stone" which was set shows that "the tomb could not be opened except by the help of many hands. Again, if He had been buried in the earth, they might have said: They dug up the soil and stole Him away," as Augustine observes[†]. Hilary (Comment. in

Matth. cap. xxxiii) gives the mystical interpretation, saying that "by the teaching of the apostles, Christ is borne into the stony heart of the gentile; for it is hewn out by the process of teaching, unpolished and new, untenanted and open to the entrance of the fear of God. And since naught besides Him must enter into our hearts, a great stone is rolled against the door." Furthermore, as Origen says (Tract. xxxv in Matth.): "It was not written by hazard: 'Joseph wrapped Christ's body in a clean winding-sheet, and placed it in a new monument,' and that "'he rolled a great stone,' because all things around the body of Jesus are clean, and new, and exceeding great."

[†] Cf. Catena Aurea